NOTE XXVII.

ON RHIZOMYS SUMATRENSIS

BY

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It perhaps will for ever remain an insolvable puzzle why Sir Raffles described under the name *Mus sumatrensis* a Mouse (after a drawing and a specimen) not from Sumatra, as the name should give reason to believe, but from Malacca, an animal after Major Farquhar not uncommon there and perhaps to be found in most parts of the Malay peninsula. Sir Raffles' paper has been read December 5, 1820, communicated by Sir Everard Home in the meeting of the Linnean Society of London, and it does not appear that one of the members has been struck by the remarkable perplexing contradiction! Mr. Temminck thinking it nonsense to bestow upon an animal from the Indian continent the name of an island where the animal is unknown, called it *dekan* instead of *sumatrensis*. The latter name however — being nonsense or not — is the first given and ought to be generally accepted. Temminck was quite right in separating the species from the genus *Mus*: he gave it the generic title *Nyctocleptes*, so that the correct writing of the Malacca-animal would have been *Nyctocleptes sumatrensis* (Raffles), if not Mr. Gray a couple of years previously had created the genus *Rhizomys* for the reception of a new species from China and that of Raffles'. The name for the latter stands therefore as *Rhizomys sumatrensis* (Raffles).

In the course of later years there have been found on the Indian continent several other species of large Mice belonging to the genus *Rhizomys*; so it might have happened that in Sumatra too a distinct species, quite different from Raffles' *sumatrensis*, had been procured — what a confusion would have been the indispensable and unevitable consequence!

And indeed the genus *Rhizomys* is represented in Sumatra, as irrefragably demonstrated by individuals in the Leyden Museum captured in East-Sumatra, Deli: happily they belong without the slightest doubt to *sumatrensis* Raffles from the continent!

The first intelligence of its existence in Sumatra we had by receiving a skull, presented with a large collection of other animals from Deli to our Museum by the untiring Dr. Hagen in 1882; ten years later I bought a skeleton collected by Mr. Moesch in Sumatra; in 1891 Prof. Hubrecht procured a very young specimen from West-Sumatra, Loeboek Basong, between the lake of Manindjoe and Priaman; finally in 1895 I procured a specimen from the Zoological garden in the Hague, where it had lived for some time, being sent over by Mr. Goedhart at Medan, Deli; so that we possess at present one stuffed skin, two skeletons and one skull, all originating from Sumatra. The three skulls from Sumatra agree exactly with the skulls of *sumatrensis* from the continent, as we possess two skulls from Malacca to compare the Sumatra-skulls with.

Our stuffed specimen is silvery white colored, here and there a single dark colored hair is to be found. The tail is like that organ in our Malacca-specimens absolutely destitute of scales and not a single hair is to be detected upon it even not with the aid of a lens. Raffles described the tail as »scaly"; in Flower and Lydekker's Introduction, 1891, p. 477, the tail in the genus *Rhizomys* is mentioned as »partially hairy". Dr. Anderson monographing the genus says (Yunnan Expedition, 1878, p. 321), that in *Rhizomys* »the tail is perfectly nude and there are no scales".

As far as I am aware *R. sumatrensis* stands alone among the other *Rhizomys*-species by its leather-clad tail, *no hairs nor scales.*

The skeleton presents 7 cervical vertebrae, 15 thoracic, 5 lumbar, 4 sacral and 16 caudal vertebrae (in Prof. Flower's introduction to the osteology of the Mammalia, by Dr. Gadow, 1885, the figures are for *R. pruinosus* 7, 15, 5, 5, 18; in the Catalogue of bones of Mammalia in the collection of the British Museum, 1862, I see *R. badius* with 7, 13, 6, 4, 16). It has a larger number (15) of ribs than any other Rodent except *Capromys* and the *Hystricidae.*

Habits. Sir Raffles says: »it is called by the natives Dekan and by the Europeans in India the Bamboo Rat, from its being found principally about bamboo hedges, and being said to live on their roots". Temminck remarked: »ce singulier animal vit en famille dans des trous qu'il se creuse dans les racines des bambous; on ne le trouve que dans les vastes plantations presque impénétrables de bambous qui couvrent la presqu'ile de Malacca; la racine ainsi que les jeunes pouces de cette plante lui servent d'aliment; il se cache de jour et ne sort de sa retraite souterraine qu'à la nuit; ce qui fait qu'on le trouve difficilement". Dr. B. Hagen (Die Pflanzen- und Thierwelt von Deli auf der Ostküste Sumatra's, p. 125 [1]) stated: »das merkwürdiges Thier, von mir zum erstenmal auf Sumatra gefunden, ist nicht häufig, aber auch nicht besonders selten denn ich erhielt mehrere Exemplare. Nach Aussage meiner malaiischen Jäger gräbt sich das Thier in der Erde Gänge nach seinem Lieblingsfütter, den Wurzeln der verschiedenen Bambusa-Arten. Eine Zeit lang hörte ich des Nachts immer ein eigenthümlich helles, lautes, fast kläglich klingendes Geschrei in Absätzen aus einer benachbarten, aber jenseits eines Flusses mir unzugänglichem, Bambusapflanzung hervorschallen. Meine Jäger versicherten, dies sei die Stimme des fraglichen, in der Erde nach Bambu-

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[1] Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Aardrijkskundig Genootschap, 1890.

wurzeln grabenden Thieres. Dass Gebiss derselben ist furchtbar. Einst erhielt ich zwei lebende, schmutzigweisse Junge, die ein Malaie an einem hochgelegenen Flussufer ausgegraben haben wollte. Ich sperrte sie in einen schweren, stark aus hartem Holze gefügten Kübel, da ich bange war, dass sie mir eine gewöhnliche Kiste im Nu durchbeissen würden. Trotzdem sie nun an der glatten, concaven Innenfläche des Kübels für ihre Zähne gewiss schwer einen Ansatzpunct fanden, waren doch die beiden nach einigen Stunden durch ein, mit grosser Kraft ausgenagtes Loch auf Nimmerwiedersehen entflohen."